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# MONTHLY REVIEW

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AN INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST MAGAZINE

## GLOBALIZATION AND THE WELFARE STATE: A DEBATE

FRANCES FOX PIVEN
RICHARD A. CLOWARD
ELLEN MEIKSINS WOOD
HARRY MAGDOFF

VOL. 49
8

## UPS AND DETROIT NEWSPAPER STRIKES

JANE SLAUGHTER

## A MATHEMATICIAN'S FAITH

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**ALSO INSIDE:**
Martin Glaberman on Staughton Lynd

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EDITORS:
Paul M. Sweezy Harry Magdoff Ellen Meiksins Wood Leo Huberman (1903-1968)
Associate Editor: W.H. Locke Anderson Assistant Editor: Kira Brunner Circulation Manager: Martin Paddio

## NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

*MR* has always been known for its style as well as its substance. We've always aimed for depth of analysis without sacrificing clarity and accessibility. We've also tried to keep our articles relatively short, not just to maintain the small and affordable size of the magazine but also because we're writing for an audience of socialists who lead busy lives—for people who work long and hard hours, in factories, offices, educational institutions, and at home, and for activists no less than for intellectuals.

We try, of course, to publish articles that teachers at various levels, from high school to grad school, can use in the classroom and in their

*(Continued on inside back cover)*

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# A LETTER TO A CONTRIBUTOR: THE SAME OLD STATE

by HARRY MAGDOFF

*The substance of what follows is contained in a letter to the author of an article we will be publishing in a later issue. The editors, who were shown copies of the letter, thought that the content would interest MR readers and they asked me to fix it up for publication. In doing so, some points were expanded to support the argument and footnotes were added.*

Dear Chris,

As mentioned over the phone, we like your article very much. It needs to be shortened, and we will be suggesting some editorial changes. Meanwhile, I would like to get your thinking about my disagreement with this statement in your conclusion: "Today's neo-liberal state is a different kind of capitalist class than the social-democratic, Keynesian interventionist state of the previous period." I can't see any significant difference in either the state or its relation to the ruling class, even though clearly there is a considerable difference between the functioning of the capitalist economy during the so-called golden age and the subsequent long stretch of stagnation. I do not mean the absence of any change at all in the capitalist class. Thus, the growing influence of the financial sector (not necessarily a separate sector) is noteworthy. But that is hardly a measure of a major change in the state.

The term "Keynesian state" has become a catchword that covers a variety of concepts and is usually misleading. It may



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have some meaning for the Scandinavian countries and elsewhere. But the United States? Although the concept is often applied to the New Deal, the deficit spending of the New Deal had nothing to do with Keynes (nor did Hitler's recovery via military expenditures). It's true Washington economists were delighted with the appearance of Keynes's *The General Theory of, Employment, Interest, and Money* because it gave them theoretical handles for analysis and policy thinking (e.g.,the offset to savings concept and a framework for gross national product accounts). Nevertheless, despite a promise of heavy government spending, and Keynes's theoretical support, the New Dealers were stumped by the 1937-38 recession, which interrupted what looked like a strong recovery. There was then as there is now an underlying faith that capitalism is a self-generating mechanism. If it slowed down or got into trouble, all that was needed was a jolt to get back on track. In those days, when farm life supplied useful metaphors, the needed boost was referred to as priming the pump.The onset of a marked recession after years of pump-priming startled Washington. Questions began to be raised about the possibility of stagnation in a mature capitalism, the retarding effect of monopolistic corporations, and other possible drags on business. These concerns faded as war orders flowed in from Europe, and eventually they disappeared when the United States went to war. The notion of the "Keynesian Welfare State" has tended to disguise the fact that what really turned the tide was not social welfare, Keynesian or otherwise, but war. In that sense, the whole concept of Keynesianism can be mystification.

Although fear of a return of depression existed for a while after the end of the war, it was not long before a new spirit of optimism took over. By and large, economists began to believe that they had a handle on how to achieve permanent prosperity. They claimed scientific validity for their mixture of neoclassical economics and Keynes. With this blend, potential economic fluctuations presumably could be anticipated and avoided or at least minimized. The Second World War awoke a renewed confidence in capitalism's potential. In

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addition, economists began once more to believe that they knew it all. The strong growth in the early postwar decades gave rise to optimistic myths. Even Nixon declared himself a Keynesian. The prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s was widely attributed to the wisdom and advice of the new economics. Let us, however, look at the record.

There are two aspects to the faith in what Keynesian interventionism can accomplish. One has to do with moderating or eliminating the business cycle. For this, there has to be confidence in the ability to foretell where and how far the economy is likely to turn. With this knowledge, followed by the requisite changes in monetary and fiscal policies, the business cycle can be tamed and economic insecurity overcome. As it turned out neither of these claims have substance. Forecasting is at best an art, not science, and even as an art, untrustworthy. Moreover, the tinkering with money, interest rates, and federal finance are more often than not lesser influences among the gale-force winds that tear through the economy. I don't mean that money and fiscal policy are totally unimportant. Money has to be centrally managed for the economy to work. And at times the actions of the monetary authorities can make a real difference. For example, in a society which lives on credit, a sharp rise in the interest rate for the sake of controlling inflation may be able to hold back an inflationary wave, while at the same time causing heavy unemployment and many business failures. In general, the Fed's fiddling with the money supply and interest rates is mostly a response to the needs of the financial community and has little, if anything, to do with creating jobs and promoting economic growth. The simple refutation about the claims for Keynesian intervention, however, is that there were three recessions during the "golden age."

The second great achievement of Keynesianism (not claimed by Keynes himself, incidentally) is that it holds the secret of long and presumably endless, strong economic growth. Truly astonishing is the claim that, recessions or no recessions, so-called Keynesian intervention created the great wave of postwar prosperity. Just listen to Paul Samuelson, the

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first recipient of the so-called Nobel Prize in economics, Without a trace of shame or reservation, he proclaimed loudly and clearly in a 1968 *Newsweek* column:

> Our economic system has far surpassed the prophecies of even the most optimistic experts. The New Economics really does work. Wall Street knows it. Main Street, which has been enjoying 92 months of advancing sales, knows it. The accountants who chalk up record corporate profits know it.[1]

Believe it or not, a lot of people think that this was really the case, even those who do not ignore the coexisting poverty and misery of masses of people. But was it in truth the doctrine of the new economics, or as you note, social-democratic policies that brought forth the golden age? Yes, but only if wars, imperialism, and militarism are included under the rubric of social democracy and Keynesianism.

Consider the government budget, the most relevant area of government intervention. There are two categories in the budget that lie outside the normal appropriation decisions. The first is the Social Security Trust Funds. These are accumulated from specific payroll taxes which have been producing a surplus over what is needed for current social security payments. The only effect this surplus has on year-to-year expenditures is a cosmetic one, since it helps disguise the size of the government deficit. The trust funds are, by law, sacrosanct, and the surplus may only be used to buy U.S. bonds. The second "rigidity" in the budget is the money spent to pay interest on U.S. bonds. That amount is set by the size of the government debt and the interest rates which prevailed at the time the bonds were initially issued. Now, if we deduct these two non-discretionary items from federal government expenditures, we find that in the golden 1950s seventy percent of discretionary government spending went for what is euphemistically called national defense! Welfare spending began to rise in the 1960s—the Good Society, which can arguably be seen, in large measure, as an attempt to calm the virulent civil rights struggle and the widespread anti-Vietnam War militancy. But even then, with a rise in welfare spending, sixty

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percent of the adjusted government spending was used for militarism.[2]

Spending on war goods has a special relevance to the current discussion. Much of the thinking about government spending in support of the economy assumes that increasing consumer demand will start the ball rolling. But that is not the case if there is plenty of excess production capacity or if the increase in demand is not large and reliable enough to prompt capitalists to invest in additional capacity. And yet, a sustainable expanding market economy needs active investment as well as plenty of consumer demand. Now the beauty part of militarism for the vested interests is that it stimulates and supports investment in capital goods as well as research and development of products to create new industries. Imagine what would have happened to the enormous wartime buildup of airplane factories had it not been for the Korean War and the pathology of the Cold War. The latter kept the airplane companies busy and highly profitable, meanwhile providing a base for the spread of civilian aircraft and the sprouting of passenger air travel. Military orders made significant and sometimes decisive difference in the shipbuilding, machine tools and other machinery industries, communication equipment, and much more. In short, apart from other matters, the explosion of war material orders gave aid and comfort to the investment goods industries. (As late as 1985, the military bought 66 percent of aircraft manufactures, 93 percent of shipbuilding, and 50 percent of communication equipment.)[3] Moreover, it needs to be noted that spending for the Korean War was a major lever in the rise of Germany and Japan from the rubble. Further boosts to their economies came from U.S. spending abroad for the Vietnamese War.

The United States had still more in its favor as the kingpin of imperialism: not only predominance of military strength but also preeminence of the dollar. The latter, enshrined "as good as gold" by the Bretton Woods Agreement, gave the United States pretty much of a free hand to spend wildly as it spread its wings over foreign lands. Normally, countries which spend more in foreign lands than they earn

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abroad have to pay for the difference, either from reserves of gold and international money, or by borrowing on the international market. The United States was unique to the extent that it had no such restraint. Dollars flowed abroad for imports, for maintaining military bases around the world, for economic and military aid to real or wished-for allies, and for the rise of its multinational industrial and financial firms. This resulted in a persistent deficit in the current balance of payments. But in contrast with other countries, especially those of the third world, whose balance-of- payments difficulties cast them into debt peonage, the United States became richer and richer. The U.S. deficits get paid with U.S. dollars—either by direct increase of the money supply or the expansion of credit. This isn't the time or place to explain the ins an outs of this subject; I thought it worth bringing up in light of common illusions about Keynesian techniques to use control of the money supply and interest rate adjustment as regulators of the business cycle. Whatever merit this belief may have, it pales into insignificance compared with the tides that buffet the Fed and the Treasury faced with the problems of keeping the dollar afloat as an international currency and as a means of coping with this country's international debt.This was so in the earlier so-called Keynesian period, when the Fed had enough gold to back the dollar, and continues to be so after the United States unilaterally abandoned the promise made in Bretton Woods to exchange gold for dollars submitted by foreign central banks. In other words, what has allowed the United States to face these problems in ways that other countries can't has not been Keynesianism but U.S. hegemony and its legacies.

As a footnote, let me add that the spirit and substance of neo-liberalism was very much alive in Washington and the financial community in "the age of Keynesian social democracy." Washington didn't need inspiration from Maggie Thatcher to initiate an offensive against labor unions. The tide against labor began in 1947 with the passing of the Taft-Hartley Act, and continued with subsequent legislation, court decisions, and the practice of the National Labor Relations

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Board. Furthermore, the entire apparatus of neo-liberalism was pushed, and, where possible, enforced for the sake of the open door in the third world for U.S. corporations. The road to NAFTA began early on in the postwar period. At a 1948 conference in Bogota, twenty American nations signed agreements to facilitate foreign investment. Bilateral Treaties of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation, were negotiated with countries on other continents to pave the way for the unrestricted investment of U.S. capital. Enlargements of markets and private investment opportunities were key objectives of the World Bank and the IMF from day one. The IMF in particular assumed the robes of the colonial overseer, enforcing the rules of the game, including the discipline of austerity for the masses, in order to assure an uninterrupted flow of profits and debt service to the centers of the capitalist world. The difference between the so-called Keynesian period and today is that in earlier days there was a hush-hush aspect to the discipline imposed on the third world, whereas now neoliberal principles are loudly proclaimed as the true faith.

There are two sides to the misconception that the state has fundamentally changed. Not only was neoliberalism alive and well in the Keynesian era, state intervention is an essential feature of the neoliberal era. Samuelson's nonsensical boast was made just when the prosperity phase was coming to an end and the whirlwinds of financial fragility were beginning to appear. The changeover is well described by Henry Kaufman, an especially discerning Wall Streeter:

> It seemed that modern economics had found ways to prevent the crisis and panic that had hit most generations at least once in their lifetime. There was much that was reassuring besides the reasonable economic performance of the 1950s and early 1960s.... Even the language of economists contained great assurance. More economists spoke convincingly about objectives and made bold predictions about future stability.
>
> When a financial crisis finally struck it was not the old-fashioned kind. It was very mild. It was called the credit crunch of 1966. "Crunch" was too harsh a label, but like any crisis it was a surprise to the postwar generation, and for a while it laid siege to the savings

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deposits institutions. The subsequent crises, however, were of increasing intensity. During their most intensive moments, they contained all the ingredients that had fueled the financial debacles of old. How close we came to disaster in 1970, and then again in 1974 and early 1975, no one will ever accurately record. It was a frightening period with rapidly rising interest rates. Some spectacular business failures, spiraling preferences for high credit quality and liquidity and doubt about strength of the largest and most prominent financial institutions.[4]

This was written before the third world debt crisis (threatening bankruptcy of some if not all of the top nine commercial banks), the Savings and Loan disaster, the impending failure of the Continental Illinois Bank and other pitfalls for the economy. What was the nature of these crises?

Panic and, in some instances, the collapse of the financial house of cards, were circumvented by major government rescues. The rescues took on different forms, for example: giant loans by the government directly or via the Fed; takeover of Continental Illinois until its affairs were straightened out; and outright expenditures such as the $200 billion obligated to rescue the savings and loan banks. One of the outstanding features of the neoliberal period is supposed to be a reduction of state involvement in the economy. In fact, though, direct interventions by the U.S. government during recent decades were the underpinning of the economy.

By now it should be obvious why I think that there has been no decisive change in either state or ruling class. The United States is the same imperialist power, formerly the hegemon and now striving to remain the predominant country among the imperialist powers. I am not saying that all that happened was predetermined and inevitable. There are usually a range of strategic and tactical policies to consider and fight over. But as long as the fundamentals of capitalism and imperialism are inviolable, the debate over policy and the choice of policy will fall within a narrow range, the more important ones buffeted by changes in the economic tides.

It is not the state or ruling class that has changed, but the economy. M-C-M′ was in full bloom for a couple of decades

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but began to slow down in the late 1960s. [The formula was Marx's way of summarizing a fundamental attribute of capitalism. M(oney) is used to buy labor, machinery and raw materials to produce (C)ommodities, which when sold yield a greater amount of money (M')] As stagnation began to take over, the opportunities to make money in the "old-fashioned" way diminished. However, as the hart panteth after water, money panteth for more money. If M-C-M' didn't produce enough profit growth, then by hook or by crook other means were explored.The business world turned increasingly to financial schemes, to outwitting the constraining regulations over financial institutions, and to the spiraling of speculation to dizzying heights. But with this came an increase in fragility, at times signaling potential collapse of the whole temple.

What should a responsible business-promoting state then do? Clearly intervene with subsidies, loans, and an easing of regulations. Seeking M', the financial folk spread their wings ever wider, defying the remaining regulations and also moving closer to the brink. What then? Once again, the government enters the fray. The more the economy depends on finance the more deregulation becomes the order of the day. And with the upsurge of international finance came the drive for deregulation in all the leading markets. To back this up, an ideology is needed: the ideal of a hands-off government (especially when social justice is at stake), except when rescue operations of business firms are called for. Other novelties of these days include the privatization fetish, which is in the aid of M-C-M' opportunities. (Something like 20 to 30 percent of foreign investment in the third world in recent years has been used to buy up privatized infrastructure).

You may be surprised at my going on at such length to dispute a simple sentence in your piece. My excuse is that the mythology of a possibly endless Keynesian welfare state is deeply rooted on the left as elsewhere. If the belief isn't engraved at the conscious level, it is well preserved at the

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unconscious. Reform proposals by progressives tend to seek ways to reestablish a Keynesian "harmony," when what we should be working for are changes that challenge capitalism and the ideology of the market system. The educators among us have a huge educating job ahead; to explain why challenging capitalism at every opportunity is in the best interest of the working classes of the world.

Perhaps in writing to you this way I am preaching to the converted. I look forward to learning your reactions to this diatribe.

With best wishes,

Harry

## NOTES

1. *Newsweek,* November 4,1968, as quoted in Richard B. DuBoff and Edward S. Herman, "The New Economics: Handmaiden of Inspired Truth," *The Review of Radical Political Economics,* August 1972.
2. Those who would like to check my arithmetic will find the basic data in U.S. Department of Commerce, *National Income and Product Accounts of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, February 1993), Vol.1, Tables 3.2 and 3.12.
3. Ann Markusen and Joel Yudken, *Dismantling the Cold War Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) p.37.
4. Henry Kaufman, "Foreword" to Edward I. Altman and Edward W. Samets, *Financial Crises, Institutions and Markets in a Fragile Environment* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977), p.vii.

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# ERAS OF POWER

FRANCES FOX PIVEN and RICHARD A. CLOWARD

During the past few years a strong challenge has been mounted in the pages of *Monthly Review* to the argument—prevalent on the left as well as the right—that globalization and technological change have combined to bring us into a new era. Ellen Meiksins Wood captured the gist of the emerging *MR* position in an essay entitled "Modernity, Postmodernity, or Capitalism" in which she asserts that there has been no historic rupture, no epochal shift, to usher in globalization or postfordism or postmodernism. All these concepts have "the effect of obscuring the historical specificity of capitalism" which "by definition means constant change and development...." What we are witnessing is the diversification and extension of the old logic of the mass production economy.[1] "This *is* capitalism."[2]

We agree with much of the empirical basis for the *MR* challenge to the new catechisms about globalization and technological change. We agree, for example, with the arguments, made variously by Wood, Tabb, and Henwood in the pages of *Monthly Review*, and by Gordon, Zevin, Hirst, and Thompson, and others elsewhere, that the competitive pressures in domestic markets attributed to increased global trade and capital movement have been vastly overstated, especially

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Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward are co-authors of *The Breaking of the American Social Compact* (New Press, 1997).



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with regard to the United States, which remains less exposed to international trade and capital flight than most other rich industrial countries.[3] And we also agree that much of this is not really new in any case, that international integration characterized earlier periods of capitalist development, particularly the years before the First World War.

But if the system is basically the same, why is so much changing? In particular, why are class power relations changing? The evidence is considerable. Unions, once the bedrock of working-class power, are on the defensive, losing members in most capitalist countries, and in Britain and the United States, losing battles as well—at least when they dare to fight them.[4] Meanwhile, historic left parties are refashioning themselves as the champions of neoliberal policies, and turning their backs on the organized working class that was once their base. Welfare state protections, the main political achievement of the industrial working class, are being whittled back in the interest of labor market "flexibility;" cutbacks in social benefits intensify worker insecurity, smoothing the way for lower wages and less secure conditions of employment. And inequalities are widening, especially in Britain and the Untied States, where income and wealth inequalities are spiraling to nineteenth-century levels.

To be sure, it still *is* capitalism. But we think the innovation and development characteristic of capitalism is interacting with shifts in class power to produce convulsive changes not only in patterns of production and exchange, but in patterns of culture and politics. And, contrary to Wood, we think these developments are usefully characterized as ruptures with the past, the continuities of capitalist social relations notwithstanding. Indeed, we think such ruptures have studded the history of capitalism, sometimes affecting particular industries, but sometimes transforming entire societies. Capitalism develops not only through gradual and incremental changes propelled by the logic of accumulation, but also through wrenching upheavals forged by momentous class power conflicts, as when the organization of steel production was transformed by smashing the craft workers in the nine-

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teenth-century United States, or when public sector unionism was crushed in the post First World War period. And, again contrary to Wood, we think such upheavals are sometimes so broad in scope and consequence that they usefully demarcate distinctive eras or epochs. The events which culminated in the termination of English poor relief in favor of an "unregulated" market in labor in the 1830s marked such an epochal change, which the intense protests of the Chartist movement could not reverse. It may be that the interplay of contemporary economic restructuring and power shifts in the advanced capitalist countries, and especially in the United States, is also epochal in its significance. In any case, it is a class power struggle which has to be understood in power terms, a predatory mobilization by capitalists made possible by working-class weakness and disarray, although justified in economic terms as the result of new market imperatives.

I

We make our argument about power upheavals in two parts. First, we discuss the theoretical basis for the longstanding left conviction that labor power is rooted in capitalist production relations, and in the organization of workers for political power that production relations facilitate. *MR* authors share this conviction, and so do we. Second, and this is our more distinctive argument, we think that actualization of the power is by no means automatic or inevitable, but is realized only over time and with difficulty, as ordinary people penetrate dominant ideologies, build the solidarities that make the actualization of power possible, and challenge the rules which guarantee their quiescent co-operation. The disturbances which ensue as people discover and act on the power capacities yielded them by specific forms of economic and political organization lead to new institutional arrangements: the creation of a social compact to conciliate popular forces, while also regulating and caging them. Economic change may shatter these achievements, not because capital no longer depends on labor in the abstract, or because state rulers no longer depend on mass publics, but because the

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painfully constructed forms of popular understanding and organization, which made possible the realization of some power from the bottom, weaken. The erosion of popular power capacities in turn smooths the way for new assertions of power from the top. Capital breaks the social compact which working-class power made necessary. By doing so, however, it may also unleash new possibilities for popular struggle.

Capitalist societies organize production and exchange through networks of specialized and interdependent activities. These networks of co-operation are also networks of contention. They help to shape the interests and values which give rise to conflict. More important for our argument, networks of interdependency also generate dispersed power capacities. Agricultural workers depend on landowners, but landowners also depend on agricultural workers, as industrial capitalist depend on workers , the prince depends in some measure on the urban crowd, and governing elites in the modern state depend on the acquiescence if not the approval of enfranchised publics.

Actual power relations are of course tangled and intricate, since urban, democratic, and capitalist societies generate multiple and cross-cutting forms of interdependence. We take for granted, however, that some relationships are much more important than others. The *dominant* interdependencies—and the power constellations they make possible—develop within economic relationships, and within the relations which anchor state elites to the societies they rule. Thus dominant interdependencies, and dominant forms of power, reflect the co-operative activities that generate the material bases for social life, and that sustain the force and authority of the state. If workers withhold their labor, production stops; if they withhold their votes, regimes fall. And, of course, the one set of relations is deeply intertwined with the other. States define and enforce property rights, regulate money and credit, and regulate the relations between employer and employees, for example.[5] The relations between class-based interest groups and state authorities inevitably focus importantly on these economic policies. And the broadly parallel evolution of in-

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dustrial capitalism and electoral-representative institutions in the twentieth-century means that working-class economic challenges are systematically transported into the relations between voting publics and the state.

This emphasis on power capacities shaped by the interdependent relations which constitute economy and polity is clearly consistent with the Marxist view of working-class power as rooted in the role of the proletariat as a force in capitalist production. It is, we should note, also consistent with other important theoretical traditions, including, for example, Norbert Elias' depiction of the development of European central states as propelled by the dynamics generated by the networks of interdependency which developed among the warrior rulers of these societies.[6] And it fits Schumpeter's model characterizing the capitalist state as the "tax state" which, because it depends on economic resources it does not control, ties state authorities in close interdependence with the owners of private property who do control those resources.[7]

The left confidence in working-class power was also expressed in the belief that working-class power would grow. Marx had rooted the growth of proletarian power in the development of industrial capitalism; Bernstein saw roughly parallel possibilities for working-class power in the development of electoral-representative arrangements. Social democratic perspectives later melded the power yielded workers by industrial capitalism with the power generated by electoral representative arrangements, so that working-class power resources were said to grow in tandem with both industrial capitalism and electoral democracy.[8] In the happiest variants, these power resources resulted in a welfare state compact which promoted the "decommodification" of labor, and therefore a fundamental empowerment of labor in market relations.[9]

A broadly compatible view of the growth of working-class power is incorporated in the work of historians dedicated to recovering the history of "protest from below" in preindustrial Europe, such as Eric J. Hobsbawm, George Rudé, and Charles Tilly. Even pluralist analysts point to the interdependencies of voters and political elites generated by liberal democ-

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racy itself, arguing that periodic elections and an enfranchised mass public forces elites to defer to the popular will. One variant or another of this optimistic perspective has nourished the left for at least a century and a half.

With these points made, it is clear that the globalization thesis cuts to the core of left political conviction. The effective exercise of labor power has always been premised on the limited ability of capital to exit or threaten to exit from economic relations. Globalization, together with postfordist production methods, seems to open unlimited opportunities for exit, whether through the relocation of production, accelerated trade, worker replacement, or capital flight, all of which seems to radically reduce the dependence of capital on labor. Workers, for their part, tied as they are by their merely human fear of change and rupture, can never match these exit options. And while working-class voters may still be able to make regimes topple, the significance of voting power depends on the significance of state power. But, so the argument goes, states whose sovereignty is confined to fixed territories also must knuckle under to the whims of a mobile capital. Economic globalization thus presumably eviscerates both economic and political forms of working-class power. As a result, workers and voters in the mother countries of capitalism are now pitted against low-wage workers and feeble governments everywhere, and pitted against technological advances as well. So, if the globalization thesis is true, it is devastating to the left as we have known it.

No wonder the determination with which *MR* authors (and we as well) scrutinize and challenge the argument. But scrutinizing and disputing the extent of global trade or capital movement does not quite grapple with the realities of class power under new conditions. What is at issue is not simply whether it is still capitalism, or whether capital is still dependent on labor in the abstract, or whether nation states still matter, but whether economic changes have undermined the conditions which once made at least the partial actualization of economic and political power from the bottom possible.

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II

Over the broad sweep of Western and capitalist development, the old idea that working-class power will grow as capitalism develops may yet prove to be correct. There are some strong theoretical reasons for thinking so. If power is rooted in interdependent relations, then the increasingly elaborate division of labor that characterizes capitalist societies, as well as the continued penetration of the core into the periphery with the consequent absorption of previously marginal groups into the capitalist division of labor, would diffuse power capacities more and more widely. (Our reading of the political implication of Durkheim's idea of the growth of organic solidarity is similar: a tighter grid of interdependencies means that everyone in the grid has some leverage, at least under some conditions.) This line of reasoning reverses the conventional wisdom: it is not decentralization but centralization and the integration that it implies that enlarges at least the abstract possibility of popular power. The remote village may be shielded by its remoteness from a predatory state or a predatory capital, but neither can it have influence on the state or capital until it is brought into some kind of relationship with them.

But while capitalist development increases the *potential* power of working class and previously marginal groups, it can also work to impede the *actualization* of that power potential. Whatever is true in principle of the advancing division of labor, the power capacity of lower strata groups has certainly not advanced smoothly. At the very least, there have been periodic sharp reversals, and we appear to be witnessing such a reversal now.

In principle, economic and political organization yields power to all parties who make necessary contributions to economic or political processes. In principle, workers in a capitalist economy always have potential power over capitalists, whether they labor as agricultural tenants, or as industrial workers, or as technicians in a postindustrial economy. In principle, they have power because their contributions are

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necessary to ongoing processes of production and exchange. But the actualization of those power capacities is conditional on their ability to withhold or threaten to withhold their co-operation, and this capacity depends on other features of worker-employer relationships beyond the fact of interdependency. To understand class power dynamics, and especially to understand the impact of postindustrial changes on worker economic and political power, we have to pay attention to the ways that economic change affects the ideas and capacities for organization of working-class groups, and their ability to withstand threats of capital exit or deploy threats of exit themselves.

The first condition for the assertion of power from below is that people *recognize* their contribution to economic and political life. Economic and political interdependencies are real in the sense that they have real consequences. But they are also cultural constructions. To be sure, if people do in fact have agency, which we take to mean at a minimum some ability to penetrate a dominant ideology, and some capacity to act outside the rules which strip them of power, then the very fact of participation in interdependent activities would incline them to recognize their contributions, and therefore their power capacities. Perhaps so, or at least to some extent, or at least under some conditions.[10] But such recognition must always overcome inherited and deeply imprinted interpretations which privilege the contributions of dominant groups,[11] and must also overcome the continuing ability of dominant groups to project new and obscuring interpretations.

Second, since the relevant contributions to ongoing economic and political activities typically involve numerous individuals, people must develop a sense of solidarity and some capacity for concerted action so that their collective leverage can be deployed against those who depend on them, for work, votes, or acquiescence in the rules of civic life. This is the classical problem of organizing, whether workers, or voters, or community residents. And finally, the threat of exit, including the threat that employers will turn to replacement workers or that politicians will court alternative voter blocs must be

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limited, or at least the prospect of exit must not be so frightening that people cannot imagine enduring it.

These conditions for the realization of class power, and the ability of groups to manipulate them, depend on very specific and concrete historical circumstances. To appreciate this, we have to forgo our tendency to speak of classes and systems. For some purposes, these abstractions are of course useful. But the interdependencies which sometimes make assertions of popular power possible don't exist in general or in the abstract. They exist for particular groups, who are in particular relationships with particular capitalists or particular state authorities, at particular places and particular times.

Economic changes can be significant not because class interdependencies evaporate, but because economic change, especially rapid and uneven change, transforms these concrete particularities. People recognize their leverage over particular employers, not over capital in general, although they are surely influenced by more general ideas about the relationship of employers to employees. They recognize commonalities and capacities for collective action among members of particular concrete groups far more readily than among the working class in general, although here too broader group identities and antagonisms may predispose them one way or the other. And people fear the loss of particular forms of employment to which they have access, and in the particular places where their lives are rooted, although once again they are surely more likely to be alert to these dangers if they think capital exit is a more widespread phenomenon. The decline of hand-loom weaving in nineteenth-century England is an example, for it did not mean that manufacturers no longer depended on labor. But it did mean that the hand-loom weavers and framework-knitters could be starved out as manufacturers turned to women and children to work in the new mills. And as this happened, the understandings, forms of solidarity, and strategies for controlling exit, developed in an earlier era of putting-out manufacturing, eroded.

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Thus, while capital still depends on labor in general, ongoing contemporary economic changes are undermining the ideas, the solidarities, and the strategies for curbing exit threats that were developed by concrete groups under the concrete circumstances of industrial capitalism. The old occupational categories—the miners, the steelworkers, the dockers, and so on—that were at the forefront of labor struggles have been depleted. And those who remain no longer have the confidence that they can act to "shut it down," paralyze an industry, and even make an entire economy falter. Meanwhile, the working-class towns and neighborhoods are emptying out, the particular working-class culture they nourished is fading. The unions that drew on all of this are necessarily enfeebled. They are enfeebled even more by employer strategies that take advantage of the decline of older forms of working-class power to launch new and terrifying exit threats—by hiring contingent workers and strike replacements, by restructuring production, or by threatening to close plants or to shift production elsewhere.

Incessant talk about globalization and downsizing figures indirectly in all of this, as the rise of an ideology that asserts the necessary and inevitable autonomy of markets and therefore of capital, a resurrection of nineteenth-century laissez-faire doctrines about the unregulated market now expanded to world scale. But none of this talk would be especially forceful by itself. The ideology is frighteningly persuasive not only because it is heard on all sides, but because it appears to explain the decline of concrete and particular working-class groups. Globalization talk gains force not from abstract generalities about trade and capital movement, but when jobs are cut or restructured, when trucks labeled "Mexico" pull up to a striking plant, or simply when a business moves across the state line.

III

Understandably, there is a good deal of nostalgia for the working-class formations of the industrial era. We are all social democrats now, so to speak, and we mourn the passing of the

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old sureties of the mass strike, of big union and of labor parties which help to produce not only welfare state protections, but the political legitimation of the industrial-era working class. All of this was won not only because the economic and political relations of the industrial era made capital dependent on workers in the abstract, but because people in specific situations could make that dependence work for them. The loss is awesome.

But there is another face to economic change. Economic change weakens old forms of working-class power, and frees capital to smash the compact that power from below made necessary. This means new hardships, especially for more vulnerable groups. But it also means a kind of liberation from the constraints which were a condition of whatever concessions the compact granted. Federal protection for the right to organize was a victory. So was union recognition by the big industrialists a victory. These victories did not come unencumbered, however. They brought with them a new regime of labor regulation which limited the right to strike, encouraged union oligarchy, and allowed employer influence to gradually increase over time. Now, as the old victories are whittled away, the curbs on popular politics imposed with them may lose force. If they do, the possibilities of new surges of disruptive politics from below will increase.

Meanwhile, economic change also creates concrete new possibilities for worker power. People work at new and different occupations, they have different skills, and in time they will see the power potential inherent in the interdependencies of a new and fabulously complex and precarious communications-driven economy that is as vulnerable to mass disruption as the manufacturing-driven economy was. In time, maybe only a little time, they will develop the awareness of commonalities and capacities for joint action which will make working-class power possible again. And they are also likely to find the imagination and the daring to break the new rules governing communications which are even now being promulgated to criminalize the exercise of power from below.

It is the end of a power era. It is also the beginning of a power era.

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## NOTES

1. Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Modernity, Postmodernity, or Capitalism?" *Monthly Review*, vol 48, issue no. 3 (July-August, 1996) p. 34.
2. Ibid p. 38.
3. Doug Henwood, "Post What?" *Monthly Review*,vol 48, issue no. 4 (September, 1996); Doug Henwood, "Talking About Work," *Monthly Review*, vol. 49, issue no. 3 (July-August, 1997); William K. Tabb, "Globalization is *an* Issue, The Power of Capital is *the* Issue," *Monthly Review*, vol. 49, issue no. 2 (June, 1997). See also David Gordon, "The Global Economy: New Edifice or Crumbling Foundations?" *New Left Review*, issue no. 168, (March/April, 1988); Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalization in Question: The International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); and Robert Zevin, "Our World Financial Market is More Open: If So, Why and with What Effect" *Financial Openness and National Autonomy; Opportunity and Constraints*, ed. Tarig Banuri and Juliet Schor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 45 and 72. Zevin concludes after a careful examination of trends in world financial markets that "there is no convincing evidence that the policy/political 'discipline' of the capital markets is greater than it ever was." Indeed, he sees no trend toward financial openness not only over the past century, but over the last three centuries. There are disagreements in this emerging school of skeptics, of course. For example, Tabb seems to think technological change is more important than does Henwood, and Zevin also argues persuasively that financial trends have not been influenced by communications technology.
4. Bruce Western, "Union Decline in Eighteen Advanced Capitalist Countries," *American Sociological Review*, vol 60, issue no. 2 (April, 1995).
5. For a discussion, see Fred Block, "The Roles of the State in the Economy," *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg (Princenton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
6. Norbert Elias, *Power and Civility: vol. II of The Civilizing Process* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).
7. Joseph Schumpeter, "The Crisis of the Tax State," *Joseph A. Schumpeter: The Economics and Sociology of Capitalism*, ed. R. Swedberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
8. See for example Walter Korpi, *The Democratic Class Struggle* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).
9. On decommodification, see Gosta Esping-Andersen, *Politics Against Markets: The Social Democratic Road to Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) and *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princenton: Princeton University Press, 1990); and see also Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *The New Class War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985). Other class analysts saw the welfare state as less the expression of working-class interests, and more the instrument for the domination of workers, although this analysis has lost salience as welfare state programs have come under attack.

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10. Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), and before him Alexis de Tocqueville *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955). Both seemed to think that the recognition of interdependencies was inevitable when they argued that peasants would come to see the extractions of a predatory landed aristocracy as unjust unless those extractions were balanced by contributions to the peasant community.
11. This includes of course the interpretations produced by intellectuals which privilege the contributions of dominant groups. A curious example is in the literature on exchange theory, which advances a definition of power as rooted in the exchange of services and benefits, and is thus at the outset similar to our definition. But the drift of this literature, and particularly of the work of Peter Blau, is to define power in relationships as the result of furnishing needed contributions, a tautology that of course works to justify unequal power.

*(Continued from inside back cover)*

The gaps are likely to be more deeply felt now that history seems to be moving in exactly the opposite direction to the current intellectual fashions. The prospects of a renewed left politics seem more promising now than anyone would have dared to believe just a little while ago. The labor movement shows signs of being on the move again. The most cursory scan of the mainstream press reveals that even—or especially—the mouthpieces of capital are nervously noticing a shift in the wind. Consider, for instance, the bad-tempered outbursts about the power of organized labor during the recent flap over Clinton's defeat on "fast-track."

Yet at just this critical moment, the intellectual resources of the left are somewhere else. It's hard to think of another moment in history when there has been a wider gulf between left intellectuals and what's actually happening on the ground.

So we now think that *MR* should, occasionally, do what it can to fill some of the gaps. We have no intention of abandoning our own specific project, but from time to time, we'd like to try something a little different. Without ever abandoning our commitment to clarity, we'd like, once in a while, to run slightly longer pieces and debates, on major questions of special concern to socialists in today's historical conditions. We hope that these debates will, among other things, provide a useful tool for educators—in schools, universities, labor organizations, and other institutions where people are working to awaken a critical consciousness.

In this issue, we're running a debate of that kind, and we hope to run others in the future. We'd like to hear from readers what you think, and we'd be especially interested in hearing any suggestions from you about the issues that most demand this kind of treatment.

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It is with deep regret the we announce the death of *Monthly Review* author Daniel Nugent (1954-1997). Daniel was a professor of anthropology and Latin American history, his writings include *Spent Cartridges of Revolution: An Anthropological History of Namiquipa, Chihuahua* (1993). Last year he collaborated on a play, *13 Dias/13 Days: How the Zapatistas Shook the World*, performed on tour by the San Francisco Mime Troupe.

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# CLASS COMPACTS, THE WELFARE STATE, AND EPOCHAL SHIFTS (A Reply to Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward)

by ELLEN MEIKSINS WOOD

Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward have offered us nothing less than a theory of history to challenge what they call "the emerging *MR* position" on globalization. Their argument has to be met seriously on its own terms, with an alternative historical analysis—especially since they are far from alone in describing globalization as the end of an era, and as the breaking of a compact between capital and labor.

## A Social Compact Between Capital and Labor?

The political moment is grim. The measures won by working class and poor people over the course of the last century, measures which humanized Western capitalism, are at risk. But they are not at risk because the structural imperatives of this new stage of capitalist development have made the social rights won in the past economically dysfunctional. Rather, they have been put at risk by the political mobilization of some human actors against other human actors. Capitalism and capitalists are on the move.... But capitalism has been on the move before, and with very similar ideas. It has also been halted before, and forced to concede the public spaces and social protections that make human life tolerable.[1]

That is the essence of Piven and Cloward's political message, and behind it lies a historical analysis. For our purposes, the most important points in it are these: in the

Ellen Meiksins Wood is co-editor of *Monthly Review*.



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history of capitalism, periods of capitalist mobilization and assaults against labor have alternated with periods of strength for labor, when capitalists have been forced to make concessions. Those periods of concession can be called a kind of social compact. Such compacts are broken when capital again gathers strength and goes on the attack. Each compact and each breach represents an epochal shift, as one "power era" replaces another.

The current decline of the welfare state in this account represents a moment of renewed attack by capital. "Globalization" has laid the foundation for it, undermining the power of the working class by giving added plausibility to capital's perennial threat, the threat to move elsewhere. But though globalization has made it possible, the decline is not the necessary result of some impersonal and inevitable process, some "structural imperative." It stems from yet another political and ideological mobilization of capital.

There is much on which we agree. It is, I think, important to emphasize, as Piven and Cloward do, that what we're seeing today is not just some inevitable natural process but a class mobilization, that what people are calling "globalization" is not just a structural imperative but a class strategy. At the same time, though we may disagree about the constraints globalization does or doesn't impose on class struggle (I'll come back to that later), we agree—or seem to—that class strategies aren't constructed in a historical vacuum. Specific historical conditions—material, political, ideological—make some strategies possible while they rule out others.

But there are important disagreements too, which have significant political implications. I can sum up my disagreements like this: Piven and Cloward give both too much and too little credit to the "structural imperatives" of capitalism. Capitalism apparently establishes the outer boundaries beyond which class struggle can't go, but it's not clear what limits capitalism places on class struggle within those boundaries.

To put it another way, Piven and Cloward attribute both too much and too little to class struggle. They expect too much of it in the sense that they count on it to make life tolerable

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within the confines of capitalism and the strictures of the capitalist market. But in another sense, they ask too *little* of class struggle: the *best* it can do—occasionally and temporarily—is to make life more bearable within the capitalist system. If (even in this "grim" political moment) they're too optimistic about the sustainability of capitalism "with a human (or at least tolerable) face," they're too pessimistic about the possibility of transcending capitalism altogether.

Their account of historical change and epochal shifts is too simple a matter of alternations of class power between capital and labor: compacts are made as labor rises, and they are broken when labor declines and capital moves against it. In their historical account, there are too many ruptures and upheavals on the surface of capitalism, and not enough long-term historical processes. The effect is to make, say, a change of government or a single piece of legislation look like a major historical shift, while continuities and changes in fundamental social property relations seem far less consequential.[2]

I can better explain what I mean by example, by looking at the two cases which most clearly illustrate their argument about compacts and epochal shifts.

We can learn a great deal, first, by looking at their primary historical example of the kind of epochal ruptures that "transform entire societies," the events that culminated in the reform of the English poor laws in 1834. Before 1834, as far back as the Tudor era in the sixteenth-century, England had what was called "outdoor" relief—that is, relief generally provided by the parish, in the community and outside institutions such as workhouses. The nineteenth-century reforms were meant effectively to end outdoor relief. Piven and Cloward seem to be suggesting, then, that the old system represented something like a class compact, but that in 1834 capital broke that compact, subjecting labor to an "unregulated" market and ushering in a new era of capitalism.

How well does this account stand up? The Poor Law Reform of 1834 was intended above all to make relief to the poor less desirable (less "eligible") than the least attractive job available. (Sound familiar?) It certainly made life very

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unpleasant for those compelled to accept poor relief on its terms, and its ideological underpinnings were certainly, and consciously, the principles of the "free" market.

But this nasty piece of legislation was only one moment, if an especially unpopular one, in a long historical process, the subjection of direct producers to market imperatives, and the commodification of labor power. It's not even clear that the poor law reform of 1834 was an especially consequential moment in that historical process. As Eric Hobsbawm has suggested, it is "improbable" that it "actually made labour supply more flexible."[3] But in any case, the process of labor commodification, a slow process of transforming social property relations that stretches back at least to the sixteenth century, was already far advanced before the Poor Law Reform was passed. The subjection of production to market imperatives—and the effects this had in dispossessing direct producers—was well established by the end of the seventeenth century; and by the end of the 18th, the principle that labor was a commodity to be bought and sold on the market, however much it continued to be fiercely contested, was firmly in place, in practice and in theory. If in the nineteenth century it was already irreversible by anything short of revolution, the poor law reform of 1834 had little, if anything, to do with making it so.

The 1834 Poor Law Reform certainly marked a significant political, and even more an ideological, moment. But it's hard to identify any single event—or even a series of events—that represents the establishment of an unregulated labor market in the kind of epochal shift Piven and Cloward are looking for.

What about the "interplay of economic change and power shifts" which for them is the motor of epochal change? What is the relevant power shift here? If anything, working-class organization and militancy had been growing in the half century before the reform of 1834, so it could be argued that the mobilization of capital was a response less to labor's weakness than to its growing strength. In fact, a convincing theory of history could be constructed in which capital has

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gone on the attack to head off the power of labor at least as often as to take advantage of its weakness. Be that as it may, if we're looking for a specific political shift with an immediate effect on the 1834 poor law legislation, the reform of the franchise just two years earlier is a likely candidate.

The franchise reform of 1832, which enfranchised some cities hitherto without parliamentary representation, is often treated as the coming to power of the "bourgeoisie" and of industrial capital in particular. This is, to be sure, an over-simplification, since many "bourgeois" already had the vote before it, but more particularly because capitalism had long been established among the landed classes. Still, with those cautions in mind, it makes some kind of sense to see the Poor Law Reform of 1834 as a result of a political "rupture," formalized by an increase in the parliamentary representation of industrial capital. But is this what we mean when we speak of an "epochal shift," a new "power era"?

In any case, what exactly did the poor law reform bring to an end? Did it end a regime of poor relief that clearly expressed the interests of the laboring classes, that clearly represented a concession to working-class power?

Underlying the English sytem of poor relief in all its forms was the sheer destructiveness of capitalism, the damage to the social fabric that is the inevitable result of a system in which human labor power and nature itself are treated as commodities and sources of profit. That system both requires and limits social measures to correct its destructive imperatives. Seen from that vantage point, the Tudor system of poor relief was the beginning of a long series of measures, including the modern welfare state, which have been adopted at various times throughout the history of capitalism to compensate for its own destructive, and self-destructive, logic.

Direct coercion has never been enough to deal with the threats to order which are the inevitable results of such a system. And a society in which increasing numbers of people were being separated from direct access to the land and the means of their own self-reproduction in historically unprecedented ways, while at the same time being detached from the

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traditional disciplines of dependence and communal regulation, presented very specific problems of its own. Those problems in England, the first truly capitalist society, gave rise to a more systematic form of poor relief than existed anywhere else in Europe at the time.

So we are, again, talking about a long-term process and the underlying logic of capitalism. The threat of social disorder and popular unrest is the inevitable outcome of that logic, and has been since the beginning. But if fear of disorder was always a strong motivation for the ruling class in England, there was never a simple correlation between the development of English poor relief and the rise of working-class power.

In the early stages of capitalism, for instance, in an economy not yet in need of factory labor, and unable to absorb the growing numbers of people dispossessed by the concentration of property in the hands of landlords—by direct coercion and by new competitive pressures—poor relief was, among other things, a response to the ruling class fear of lawless vagabonds and "masterless men." At other times, some forms of "outdoor" relief, by making the poor dependent on their parish, responded to the needs of agrarian capital for a regularly available force of cheap casual labor. In that sense, while outdoor relief was in many respects less unpleasant than the workhouse of the nineteenth-century (though we shouldn't romanticize it, nor forget the disadvantage associated with it; the immobility it was meant to impose on workers, the deliberate stigma often attached to it, and so on), it can hardly be called a conciliatory gesture to a strong laboring class.

At the same time, each of these changes in the needs of capital can be understood only in the context of resistance and struggle by subordinate classes. The long and continuous process of subjecting labor to market imperatives was also a continually *contested* process. Apart from daily struggles over the disposition of labor and its fruits, resistance took different forms in different periods: from the enclosure riots of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at a time when the landed

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class was consolidating its concentration of property, to the bread riots that punctuated the eighteenth century at a time when the propertyless poor were most vulnerable to rises in the price of bread. The contest was also marked by continuous ideological conflicts, among different definitions of property rights, between the "moral economy" of the subordinate classes and the increasingly dominant political economy of the exploiting classes, and so on. At every stage, social policy, including the poor laws, was forged in the crucible of that changing class struggle, and at every stage, fear of disorder and popular unrest was a major determining factor.

There came a time when the process of labor commodification was effectively complete—in the sense that the dominant form of labor was now performed by permanently propertyless workers compelled to sell their labor power for a wage, not intermittently or seasonally but continuously and always. This brought with it new forms of class organization, notably trade unions, and new forms of struggle, notably strikes. It also created new social problems and new contradictions in capitalism.

Capitalism, as we all know, needs a vast reserve of labor compelled by economic necessity to sell its labor power. Yet at the same time, capitalism has always been and will remain unable to put the whole of its dispossessed labor force to work at the same time. So an advanced capitalism, which needs a vastly larger proportion of the population as a potential labor force than the system could employ in its earlier days, always has to strike a complicated balance. It has to keep that reserve army alive and ready for work while also keeping alive the economic imperatives that will compel labor to work when capital needs it.

Capitalism needs, in other words, both to maintain some kind of minimal social provision and to subject workers to the ruthless compulsions of the market. That delicate balance can never be completely upset without destroying capitalism. But the relative weight of social provision and market imperatives can shift in response to economic cycles and crises, and it is constantly subject to class struggle, which can push the bal-

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ance more in favor of social provision, as in the modern welfare state.

To sum up, then: there is no identifiable "power era" in which poor relief or other forms of social provision have responded clearly to the needs of labor. At the same time, there is no era in which resistance and struggle have *not* been essential determining factors. From the beginning, the developing capitalist system has been subject to its own destructive impulses—the drive to exploit to the limit its human and natural substance, and to tear apart the social fabric with its ruthless imperatives of commodification, accumulation, and self-expansion. From the beginning, those destructive imperatives have been resisted by class struggle. From the beginning, constant corrective measures have been needed to counteract or compensate for those destructive imperatives; and from the beginning, though in constantly changing forms, state intervention has been an indispensable corrective. From the beginning, too, the struggles of the laboring classes have pushed the state in that direction, with the paradoxical effect that capitalism has often been saved from itself by class struggle. In this constantly conflictual process, some moments have no doubt been better for workers than others. But in this long history of conflict and change, where is the compact, and where is the breach?

## Globalization and the End of the Welfare State "Compact"

Piven and Cloward tell a story about globalization analogous to the history of the earlier "compact." Proponents of what they call the "globalization thesis" have, they agree, exaggerated some of its consequences, but globalization has weakened labor by depriving workers of their sense of solidarity, their confidence in their leverage and in their ability to bring employers, whole industries, and even whole economies, to their knees. Above all, the plausibility of capital's exit threat has—at least temporarily—undermined the capacity of workers to actualize whatever potential for class power they may objectively still have. Globalization has also undermined the political power of labor by appearing to reduce the impor-

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tance of state power as it seems to transfer sovereignty to internationalized capital. And so capital has been able to break another compact.

Does this story stand up any better than the one about the poor laws? In their recent book, where their arguments are developed more fully, Piven and Cloward seem to suggest that the latest "compact" started in the 1930s, continued, re-started, or intensified after the war, and was expanded to previously excluded groups in the 1960s. But whenever it started, it's clear that it ended with the political mobilization of neo-liberalism in the 1970s.

A surprising number of people on the left talk, like Piven and Cloward, about compacts of one kind or another between capital and labor. For instance, many speak of a post-war "accord" between the classes in the United States after the Second World War. In that accord, "Keynesian" state intervention and the welfare state combined with a settlement at the microeconomic level in which labor conceded control of the labor process to capital in exchange for wage increases in keeping with productivity gains and inflation. Some commentators seem to treat this post-war accord as if it ushered in some kind of "golden age," while others are inclined to call it a betrayal by the "labor bureaucracy." But either way, for people who think in terms of a post-war accord, the electoral triumph of neoliberalism, in the persons of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, is as close as we can get to a precise moment when globalization ended that compact.

Let's, then, work back from this turning point. In what way, if any, does it mark a watershed between a social compact and its breach? What did it bring to an end?

The decline in the labor movement and the dismantling of the welfare state are obviously not illusions—though they mean more in countries that have actually had a welfare state worth talking about, which is not self-evidently true of the United States when compared to, say, the Scandinavian countries, or even Canada and Britain. In certain European cases, notably in Scandinavia, there may even be some justification for talking about the kind of "compact" Piven and Cloward

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have in mind. And the post-war "settlement" in Britain was undoubtedly driven by capital's fear of militant (and hopeful) working-class soldiers returning from the war. There is no doubt that the neoliberal program, now adopted even by social democratic regimes, marks a significant departure from that distinctive post-war moment. But let's put things into perspective.

Let's talk about the United States in particular. The first important point about the post-war "golden age" is its uniqueness.[4] For the United States, the early post-war period was a historically unprecedented and almost certainly unrepeatable "conjuncture." What was truly remarkable was the unrivalled hegemony of the United States and its relative freedom from competition. But the economic breathing-space was short (its loss only partially offset by continued military superiority and spending), as two other major players, the two defeated powers, Germany and Japan, entered their own impressive periods of growth.

What about class relations? Was there, as is often argued, an "accord" in which labor and capital agreed to keep both wages and prices relatively high by means of mutual concessions? There may have been a short period of *relative* calm in the war against labor while the lack of competition allowed capital to tolerate higher wages—though we shouldn't forget that the 1940s were the years of the Red Scare, the Taft-Hartley Act, and the beginning of the Cold War. If wages continued to rise for a while (at least in some parts of the country) even when, in the context of increasing competition, they seriously threatened profits, it was primarily because of rank-and-file militancy. But capital didn't sustain the squeeze on profits for long. If there was ever a truce in its class war against labor, it didn't last. In the late 1950s and the 1960s, class conflict heated up. U.S. capital, now facing renewed and intensified competition, launched a vicious and sustained attack on labor.

So while labor certainly lost control of the labor process (and, as some versions of the "accord" model point out, elements in the labor bureaucracy certainly collaborated in U.S. imperialist policies), it's hard to see this as an "accord."

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We have to keep in mind that the so-called golden age was a period when capital sustained its profits not by "accords" so much as by vicious class conflict: from Taft-Hartley in the late 1940s, to union-avoidance strategies by companies like IBM or deunionization strategies by General Electric in the late fifties and early sixties, to savage bouts of union-busting and "some of the worst storms in labor history" in the late fifties, followed by a decade of union unrest from the early sixties to the early seventies, with a rank-and-file chafing against their leadership's inadequate responses to attacks by capital. "It is generally forgotten," writes Mike Davis, "how close American industrial relations came to a raw re-opening of the class war in those years."[5] Far from representing a time of concord, or even a cease-fire, between the two classes, the "golden age" was a time of unrelenting assault by capital against labor.

If there was an ebb and flow in capital's war against labor during the "golden age," it was not only a matter of changes in working class power or militancy. It had a great deal to do with the beginning and end of U.S. capital's unique moment of unchallenged ascendancy. The idea of the "compact" makes that moment seem too voluntary and therefore possibly recoverable, instead of historically specific and unrepeatable. On the one hand, this tends to lay the blame for deteriorating conditions mainly on the failures of organized labor. On the other hand, if some labor leaders today still believe they can go back to a "golden age," the notion of the "compact" or "accord" may be partly responsible for that illusion.

The compact model doesn't look much better if we move further back, as Piven and Cloward seem to do, in search of the compact, to the 1930s and the New Deal. It's certainly true that labor organization in the United States reached a high point in the 1930s, and without some heroic class struggles there would have been no New Deal. But the correlation between the policies of the New Deal and the disposition of class power is far from simple and direct, and it is very hard to think of it as just a compact in which capital conciliated labor.

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I see no reason to question the often repeated observation that the New Deal saved capitalism, and was intended to save capitalism. It was, of course, done against the will of most (though not all) capitalists and against their resistance at every step. In that sense, the New Deal represents a disjuncture between the state and the capitalist class. But, as in the case of the old poor laws, it's hard to say that this disjuncture was simply determined by the strength of labor against capital, or that it acted against the interests of capital in favor of labor. Nor was the weakness of capital in that moment of extremity in direct proportion to labor's strength. On the contrary, it was the consequence of a deep economic crisis that profoundly affected *both* classes—and we surely wouldn't want to say that the effects on labor were unambiguously empowering.

While any social and political gains for the working class, both before and after the war, were never freely given without class struggle, there was never a simple and straightforward correlation between social provision and the disposition of class power of the kind suggested by the compact model.

The Second World War marked—and basically caused—the transition from depression to boom. Economic conditions in the post-war boom were exactly the reverse of those in the 1930s. In one case depression (the weakness of capital?) and in the other case economic boom (the strength of capital?) constituted the conditions for social reform. Even if the pre-war reforms can be explained by the organization and militancy of labor while capital was reeling from the Depression, what power relation explains the "golden age" after the war? It would be hard to prove that the power of labor surpassed the increasing strength of capital, and even harder to show that capital had been forced to call a truce in its war against labor. So the interplay of economic conditions and class power is clearly more complicated than the compact model or the theory of epochal shifts and "power eras" suggests.

What about the *breach* of the compact? There is no doubt that the signs of decline—in the proportion of unionized labor, in welfare, provision, and so on—have been especially dramatic since the early eighties. But, as Harry Magdoff re-

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minds us in this issue's "Review of the Month," "the spirit of neoliberalism" was already present much earlier, at the height of the so-called "age of Keynesian social democracy." Nor should we forget that in the United States the decline in union density began in the fifties, and continued as new industries developed, especially in the South and Southwest, without a corresponding organization of the new labor force (maybe, as critics of the labor bureaucracy will tell us, because these regions were deliberately conceded to capital—but if this is the "accord," it means something rather different from what Piven and Cloward seem to have in mind).

There are other problems too. If we identify the breach with the electoral triumph of neoliberalism, should we say that Thatcher's election was a response to the weakness of labor or, on the contrary, to the period of labor militancy that preceded her victory? Once again as in the case of the poor law reform, maybe the mobilization of capital had less to do with labor's weakness than with its strength. Such an explanation has flaws of its own, but it is no less, and probably more, plausible than the other. In any case, it does at least illustrate, yet again, the complexity of the relation between class power and the welfare state.

But suppose we set aside the compact theory and argue instead that, with or without a sudden and dramatic rupture, the long decline of the labor movement and the welfare state corresponds to the long-term process of "globalization," which reached a climax some time in the seventies.

Even here there are problems. We all know, of course, that the drive for expansion and internationalization belongs to the very nature of capitalism and has been evident since the beginning. *The Communist Manifesto*, composed a century and a half ago, contains as graphic a description of "globalization" as anything written today.

What, then, is new? One new feature on which everyone seems to agree is the breath-taking mobility of finance capital, perhaps the only feature that justifies the hype about the "information age" and the dramatic effects of the new technologies. But what is striking about the process of "globaliza-

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tion" in the past two or three decades, especially in the United States, is how little any of the major changes ascribed to it can be laid at the door of cyber-finance. Other aspects of "globalization," notably the internationalization of production and competition from third world economies with cheap, unregulated labor, have certainly played a significant role—though often (as Piven and Cloward point out) more as a threat than as a reality. But even this can't explain the end of the post-war "golden age."

If there was one major economic change that altered the course of economic development in the United States, ultimately leading to the end of the "golden age," it was not the technological revolutions in financial markets, nor a flight of capital to Mexico, but earlier competition from other advanced capitalist economies. If there has been an epochal change in the United States, it dates from the economic recovery of the main defeated powers after the Second World War. That also raises some interesting questions about whether globalization represents just the power of capital or also its vulnerability—but I'll come back to that in a minute.

The picture that emerges here is of a typically expansionary capitalism, "globalizing" over the long term—in fact, from the beginning—and just as typically marked by regular crisis and continuous class conflict. If this century has seen any cataclysmic episodes that mark an epochal shift in the capitalist economy, especially in the United States, they have been depression and war. These episodes have, of course, had substantial effects on the welfare state. In the United States, for instance, depression and war enabled and/or forced a temporary shift in the balance between social provision and market compulsions. That shift could not long survive an economic downturn, the roots of which can be traced to the resumption and intensification of competition among advanced capitalist economies. So maybe what we're talking about is not so much an epochal shift as a return to form, to the typical logic of capitalist development and change.

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## A Really New Power Era?

So Piven and Cloward's model of epochal shifts is no more convincing in the case of the modern welfare state than it was in the case of the poor law reform. What is it, then, about this "epochal shift" that so many people find so compelling, and what difference does it make? Its attractions for capitalist ideologues are clear enough. There is no more convincing argument for TINA (There Is No Alternative) than the insistence that history has taken some irrevocable turn, closing off options—like social democracy, let alone socialism—which may at one time have looked attractive and possible but are now a thing of the past. The appeal of such arguments to socialists, though, is rather more mysterious.

Piven and Cloward may give us a hint. "We are all social democrats now," they say. That, in a sense, is the main theme of their challenge to "the emerging *MR* position" on globalization. We are all, they say, nostalgic for the traditional certainties about the working class and the possibilities of class struggle in the "industrial era," the era of big unions, labor parties, and mass strikes—all those things that helped create the welfare state but which globalization has effectively destroyed. And we mourn the passing of all those old formations and all those old possibilities. That nostalgia is, they claim, what lies behind *MR*'s refusal to acknowledge that something fundamental has changed with globalization and that we on the left have suffered a truly "awesome" loss.

But it occurs to me that something else is going on, which I can sum up with my own aphorism: "There are *no* social democrats now." People are waking up to the fact that social democracy is not a viable option. For those who have tended to identify social democracy with social*ism*, there seems to be no other alternative to capitalism—in fact, no alternative to the more inhumane, neoliberal forms of capitalism. So the loss of social democracy is for them indeed an awesome one. It is for them a more cataclysmic and perhaps even final loss than for those who, while certainly supporting the welfare state or any amelioration of capitalism's destructive conse-

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quences, have always doubted the long-term sustainability of capitalism "with a human face." Those who used to place all their hopes in social democracy are inclined to explain their awesome loss not by conceding that a humane capitalism was *never* sustainable in the long term but by invoking some massive epochal shift which has destroyed the foundations of what used to be, but no longer is, a real possibility.[6]

Piven and Cloward seem to have mixed feelings about this. What they say about social democracy reads like an epitaph. Yet they hold out the hope of a resurrection—or at least a reincarnation in another form, some new kind of compact, some new way of making capitalism tolerable. There is, though, no hint of anything more. The "compact" model implies that what the left should be aiming for, and all we can hope for, is to wring concessions from capitalists—as earlier generations wrested concessions from the capitalist class on poor relief, which they later lost, and as workers in the "industrial" era have won and lost the welfare state. This idea that the object of working-class power is to wring concessions from capital within a capitalist system nicely sums up the essence of social democracy—especially together with a theory of history in which changes of government may look like major epochal shifts, if only because fundamental transformations of property and class relations have, in effect, been ruled out.

I agree, of course, that class power is what it's ultimately all about. And I don't want to take issue with the very useful and illuminating things Piven and Cloward say about the formation of working-class power, about the processes of organization and ideological penetration.[7] The problem I have with their argument concerns their account of what working-class power is for, or what it can and can't accomplish in the context of capitalism.

My point is simply this: there is no such thing as a compact between capital and labor in any meaningful sense. The system is constituted by the fundamental class antagonism at its heart, and within the confines of the system, the capitalist class always, by definition, has the advantage. That may help to explain, among other things, how capital can

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mobilize in response not to the weakness of labor but to its strength and yet still win the day. Class struggle is a constant necessity to ward off the worst excesses of exploitation, and the working class has had a long and heroic history of achievements in that respect. Class struggle has, paradoxically, also been necessary to save capitalism from itself and its inherently destructive, even self-destructive, drives. But within the confines of the system, the victories of working-class power, even at its highest points, will always be severely constrained and fragile. A strategy limited to the objective of wringing concessions from capital, while it may be all that is possible in certain conditions, is in the long run self-defeating.

Yet I believe that working-class power can do a great deal *more* than wring concessions from capital. Socialism still remains a realistic option—more realistic than capitalism with a human face. But even short of socialism, and as part of the struggle to attain it, there is a difference between just struggling to win concessions from capital and struggling to wrest *control* away from capital, a difference between striving for "safety nets" within the capitalist system and striving instead to detach the conditions of life from the logic of capitalism. There is, in other words, a difference between seeking some elusive and short-term class compact and challenging the underlying class relation itself.[8]

The question, then, is whether today's conditions are more or less conducive to those more ambitious goals and to the more combative methods needed to achieve them, and whether what people are calling "globalization" detracts from or enhances the possibilities of struggle.

It may be that the conditions have never yet been right for a truly socialist struggle—not just for the achievement of socialism but even for less final challenges to capitalism, struggles not just to win concessions from capital within a capitalist system but to oppose the system itself with an economic logic of a different kind. In an underdeveloped capitalism, the material conditions are simply not there. But in cases where the productive forces have been sufficiently developed to make socialist alternatives possible, the very same

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conditions that have made them so have had a contradictory effect on working-class unity, organization, and ideology.

There hasn't been the kind of unambiguous relationship between the development of industrial capitalism and the growth of a united and powerful working class which Marxists once expected. Industrial capitalism—and here I depart from much of conventional Marxist wisdom (and from the assumptions that Piven and Cloward attribute to Marxists)—has also militated *against* working-class unity, fragmenting the working class and turning it inward, away from the centers of capitalist power toward the individual workplace. Struggles at the point of production have, of course, been absolutely vital and still are, but they have also had a centrifugal effect on working-class power and struggle. They have also marked a separation between "economic" or "industrial" struggles and political ones.

What we are seeing today may be the beginning of an era—a *real* epochal shift, maybe the first of its kind in the history of capitalism—in which the material and technological conditions for a truly socialist and democratic organization of material life are present, while for the first time new conditions are emerging that can overcome the centrifugal effects of industrial capitalism and reconnect economic with political struggles. Meantime, capitalism, having become a virtually universal system, no longer has the same scope for external expansion which used to save it from its internal contradictions, so it has become subject to those contradictions in historically unprecedented ways. This is what I've called the "universalization" of capitalism, which is indeed an important historical change.

Among the current contradictions is that capitalism no longer seems able to sustain maximum profitability by means of commensurate economic growth and seems now to be relying more and more on simply *redistributing* wealth in favor of the rich, and on increasing inequalities, within and between national economies, with the help of the neoliberal state. In advanced capitalist countries, the most visible sign of that redistribution is the decline of the welfare state. And while

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changes in the patterns of labor toward growing insecurity may have more to do with this process of redistribution than with an absolute decline in the need for labor, the ability of capitalism to absorb a growing reserve army of labor is at least open to question. The result may be to break the old pattern, to upset the long-standing balance, that has up to now repeatedly saved capitalism from itself—the balance in which the danger of social unrest and disorder has been met not only by direct coercion but also by social provision.

Piven and Cloward conclude their piece by hinting at new possibilities. What I'm saying is that those possiblities may be closer than we think—and precisely because of "globalization." "Globalization" is not just about the power of capital. It is also about the *vulnerability* of capital subjected to the pressures of international competition and its own internal contradictions. Besides, I don't accept the premise of the "globalization thesis"—which Piven and Cloward never quite contradict—that the importance of the state and political power declines in proportion to globalization.

On the contrary, I think (as I have been repeating far too often, and as Harry Magdoff explains in this issues' Review of the Month more clearly than I have ever been able to do) that capital now needs the state more than ever to sustain maximum profitability in a global market—so much so, I would say, that working-class political power could now challenge capital in ways it never could before. And with the "globalizing" state as a target of struggle—we've been seeing unprecedented examples of this kind of struggle in many parts of the world in the last few years—there now exists a focus for working-class solidarity, within and across nation-states, of a kind that has never before existed in advanced capitalist countries.

So it may indeed be the beginning of a new—a *really* new—power era.

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## NOTES

1. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *The Breaking of the American Social Compact* (New Press, 1997), pp. 13-14.
2. In case it needs emphasizing, I'm not here rejecting, nor have I ever rejected, the idea of epochal shifts as such, though I think it would be difficult to find any epochal shifts that meet Piven and Cloward's criteria. And I certainly have never denied that capitalism changes. On the contrary, I emphasize that capitalism *constantly* changes. The point is that we have to understand the *processes* of change. Sometimes the concept of "epochal shifts" is a way of avoiding the issue, as we leap from one "epoch" to another while losing sight of historical process.
3. E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Penguin, 1975), p. 229.
4. The following discussion of the post-war period is indebted to Robert Brenner's forthcoming book, *Uneven Development and the Long Downturn: the Advanced Capitalist Economies from Boom to Stagnation* (Verso, 1998), Part Two, especially section II.
5. Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream* (Verso, 1986), p. 123.
6. I owe to John Mage this explanation of why so many on the left feel compelled to talk about "globalization" as a massive historical transformation of epochal proportions, different from the changes that capitalism regularly undergoes.
7. I'm not sure, by the way, why they think that I, or anyone else at *MR*, believes that there is anything automatic about the "actualization" of working-class power. See, for example, my argument in *The Retreat from Class* (Verso, 1986), chapters six and seven. I have also consistently argued, contrary to some conventional Marxist wisdom (and contrary to the assumptions Piven and Cloward attribute to Marxism), that the development of industrial capitalism does not automatically and unambiguously promote the growth of working-class power but that, on the contrary, the very structure of a mature industrial capitalism has a centrifugal effect on class struggle, a fragmentation of the working class, together with a tendency to drive a wedge between "economic" or "industrial" struggles and political ones, which requires difficult ideological and organizational processes to overcome. See, for instance, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge, 1995), chapter One, based on an article originally published in *New Left Review* in 1981; and my introduction to this year's summer issue of *MR*.
8. For a discussion of socialist—as distinct from social democratic—alternatives in societies that are still capitalist, see Greg Albo, "The World Economy, Market Imperatives, and Alternatives," *Monthly Review* (December, 1996); and Sam Gindin, "Notes on Labor at the End of the Century: Starting Over?" *Monthly Review* (July/August, 1997).

I'd like to thank Bill Fletcher Jr. for his very helpful comments, though he won't necessarily agree with everything I say.

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## A REPLY TO ELLEN MEIKSINS WOOD

by FRANCES FOX PIVEN and RICHARD A. CLOWARD

Ellen Meiksins Wood puts the difference in our positions succinctly:[1]

> Piven and Cloward attribute both too much and too little to class struggle. They expect too much of it in the sense that they count on it to make life tolerable within the confines of capitalism and the strictures of the capitalist market. But in another sense, they ask to *little* of class struggle: the *best* it can do is—occasionally and temporarily—to make life more bearable within the capitalist system. If ... they're too optimistic about the sustainability of capitalism "with a human ... face," they're too pessimistic about the possibility of transcending capitalism altogether.

The one qualification we would add is that we are neither pessimistic about "the possibility of transcending capitalism altogether," nor optimistic.[2] We take no position on socialism; indeed, we are unclear about what it now means, as are most people on the left. Moreover, we see little reason for either agreeing or disagreeing with Wood's speculation that a "universalizing" capitalism will make it more vulnerable to its internal contradictions and thus more vulnerable to transformation. The speculation about a coming transformative moment has to us an apocalyptic quality.

In the meanwhile, people struggle to survive with a measure of dignity under capitalism. Their victories, including programs to replace income when workers become unemployed, disabled, or too frail to work, certainly fall short of transformation, or we suppose of socialism. Neverthe-



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less, people are better off with such life supports than without them (and that includes outdoor relief in earlier times). We do not exalt welfare state programs. We understand their ambiguities, limitations, and inadequacies as well as anyone else, as our numerous critiques of welfare state programs attest.

To our minds, then, the key questions are what people can win under "actual existing capitalism," and how can they win it? What are the potential sources of power under specific forms of capitalism? This is not to deny that there are also continuities in capitalism, as Wood argues, that its manifestations at any particular time were in some measure present in earlier times, just as there was always class struggle. But it is also true that the changes in capitalist economic and political relations from one time to another are extremely significant because they help to determine the specific forms of power from below that are possible. In a time of commercial agriculture, displaced peasants could burn the fields of the landlords and perhaps win outdoor relief; in a time of industrialization, workers could sabotage the machines or strike, and win social welfare programs.

Just as important, historical change alters the conditions that make it possible for people to actualize the power yielded them by capitalist relations. As capitalism reorganizes, old forms of popular solidarity may be shattered, and old understandings of the possibilities of power from below may become discredited. With time, of course, new solidarities are constructed, along with new understandings that reflect the new relations created by a capitalist political economy. As a result, class power relations shift, and these shifts we think demarcate important eras within capitalism. To be sure, any attempt to impose a periodization on a densely complex history is subject to argument. Nevertheless, we think it indisputable that class power relations have changed over the course of a centuries-long capitalist history, in a pattern that is neither evolutionary nor continuous.

These shifts reflect not continuities but changes in capitalism, and the effort of people to build power out of those

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changes. That is what interests us: Given their concrete historically specific circumstances, what can people wrest from their rulers, and how can they do it?

## NOTES

1. Readers may be confused because she typifies our position by quoting not from our article in this issue, but from the introduction to our recent book *The Breaking of the American Social Compact.*
2. While we agree with this summing up of our position, Wood does misstate our argument at some key points along the way. We most decidedly do not think that "Globalization has ... undermined the political power of labor by appearing to reduce the importance of state power as it seems to transfer sovereignty to international capital." Indeed, in our recent book to which she refers we characterize this and related arguments as "The Globalization Hoax."

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# PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT: A MATHEMATICIAN'S FAITH

by DIRK J. STRUIK

I had been participating in the struggle for the freedom of Sacco and Vanzetti in the Netherlands, and then in 1927 I was in Boston, right near the prison where they were kept. And so I struggled with the protesters during the last months. I remember on the day of the execution I was in New York, where I had an assignment in the Bell Telephone Laboratories, and we went to a large mass meeting addressed by Norman Thomas, the socialist. Then news came by telephone that the execution was taking place, first Sacco and then Vanzetti. Many people cried and sobbed and shouted, "Justice is dead." That is my personal recollection of the Sacco-Vanzetti case. But now I have to say that Sacco and Vanzetti were common people, a simple shoemaker and a poor fishpeddler, and yet they were heroic. Their faith is still inspiring us.

In my life, three statements have always been before me and guided me to a certain extent. The first is the words of Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, my favorite chapter in the New Testament: "And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three, but the greatest of all is charity." The second statement

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Following is the twentieth annual Sacco-Vanzetti memorial address given at the Community Church of Boston on December 8, 1996, by Dr. Dirk J. Struik, professor emeritus at M.I.T., where he taught mathematics from 1926 to 1960. He is now 103! This article was originally printed in the *Community Church News* (September, 1997).



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is by Karl Marx: "Proletarians of all countries unite!" The third is Einstein: "A new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive and move to higher levels." There are three statements that give you a lot to think and work about. Charity in the vision of St. Paul doesn't mean giving alms, but is a translation of Latin "caritas," which is again a translation of the Greek "agape," which means something like acting according to your conscience with full consideration of the fate of your fellow man. That means, in one sense and perhaps above all, that every man is important—not only people as a whole, but every individual is important.

Once a friend of mine, a classical scholar, made the remark, "Look at the billions of people who have come and gone on this earth and how few of them have amounted to anything." That, I think, was a typical case of lack of charity. Paul, I think, would have agreed with what Lincoln once said that God must have loved the common man, because he made so many of them—of us. Every individual, I said, is important. To find this out, go and talk with and look at people. In the tedious humdrum of life, you will find a mother who is sacrificing herself for her children, a teacher whose teaching may be inspiring. Suddenly, we discover that a dull bank clerk is making watercolors. Here we find that a dull carpenter is doing the most charming woodwork.

I made a study of the shoe industry many years ago for the New York Labor Research Association, and I found out that every shoemaker, every factory worker to whom I talked had a story to tell that had a certain importance: his humor in the workplace, his attitude toward the machines, his work for the union, his fighting and work in strikes, and his action and struggle to make a living and engage in labor activity. This holds, of course, in any trade. People are not only important, they are interesting. You and I, we are all interesting. If you don't know it, I know it. Nobody had been preaching this sermon better than Balzac, the French author of the last century. If you had been reading Balzac, as I did a good deal when I was younger, you would find a kind of apostle of the common man. In his novels you will find a fascination and

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often personal greatness of a doting father, an obscure inventor, a struggling newspaperman, a country physician, a parish priest, a miserable banker and even a convict.

Take a look at the history that mankind can boast from the earliest times of the Stone Age to the time of the computer, and you will find in every society, behind an inventor of great fame there are hundreds of smaller inventors and scientists, and they are also standing on the shoulders of others even less known. But the great achievements would never have been possible unless there was a large group of more common people to set the atmosphere in which these achievements were possible. It is seen, too, in the labor movement and the history of socialism, where behind the great names like Eugene Debs stand the hundreds of common people who do the day-to-day work. All their preaching and eloquence would amount to nothing unless these common people were working day to day for the ideals for which they lived, and, are often forgotten as soon as they die. Many of them entered the socialist movement in the Netherlands in the 1910s. I met such people and was impressed by the importance of them as compared to the behavior of the leaders. Sometimes they see even deeper than the leaders, you know, and it is a good thing, too.

A few examples from my book: It was not only Horace Mann whose work made public education in this state and the United States possible, but the hundreds of people who were behind him. It wasn't only Eugene Debs who made the labor struggle well known and sometimes victorious, but the hundreds of people behind him. It was not only Peter Zenger who obtained whatever we have of freedom of the press, but the hundreds of people who were behind him and supported him. It was not only Susan B. Anthony who gave suffrage to women, but the hundreds of women who were behind her. And so we behold these outstanding persons, who worked and often sacrificed and on occasion saw deeper than their leaders.

All these events build on the faith and wisdom of the common people, if correctly informed and given scope. Because they are not, there is misery, exploitation, maltreatment,

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poverty and even death for untold masses of common people all over the world. Can charity help here? Yes, but only in the wider sense indicated by the old slogan, "Organize. Unite," or as I repeat the slogan of *The Communist Manifesto*, "Proletarians of all countries, unite!" It helped us in 1848, and it is a strong and true a slogan in 1996. It was Marx's view that a better form of society is possible, and the tools to create such a society are in the forms of the working people produced by that society itself. No higher powers or magic are necessary. Society itself produces the power for its own improvement by the common people, if well informed and organized.

Let me give you a few example of how I see it. The struggle of the working people for emancipation in the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries goes from defeat to defeat and gets stronger every time afterwards. After the revolution of 1848, which was defeated, in fifteen years the labor movement was strong enough to build the First International of 1864. The First International was destroyed after the Commune of Paris of 1871, but only eighteen years afterwards the Second International was created in Brussels, far stronger than the First International with it branches over large sections of the world. I myself lived through the years of the First World War, and I remember how in 1914 the Second International, on which we had placed our hopes that it would prevent the war, collapsed, and it was again a heavy defeat for the forces of emancipation and progress. It was due to overwhelming nationalism—sounds familiar nowadays, doesn't it?

In 1917, the Russian Revolution came, followed by revolutions in other countries, and for the first time an attempt was made to build a whole part of the world according to a socialist pattern. This was almost a success. Then in 1941 Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, and the pundits cried, "Hitler will be in Moscow in six weeks!" Those who believed it thought that again the chances for a socialist attempt to build the world would be lost, but it was not Hitler who won—you all know what happened to him. The result was the spread of attempts at socialism over very large sections of the world, including, on my fifty-fifth birthday in 1949—and there

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never was a greater present—the creation of the Chinese People's Republic, at that time on the way to socialism, and perhaps it is even now. There was the catastrophe of 1989, when the whole attempt, to a certain extent successful, to build a better society collapsed. It now seems as if capitalism—which is a capitalism in crisis—is dominating the world.

But let us carry some hope from the lessons of history, of which I have given you a few examples as I see it. I think that the chances are that out of this world of crises, in the near future even a greater struggle for human emancipation will arise than we have ever seen before. But we have to work for it, because we need to mind the words of Einstein, which I have quoted, that we need a new type of thinking. Because not only have we digressed in the organization of the working classes of the whole world, but also in the struggle for the preservation of the very Earth on which we stand and live.

This combination of the struggle for the emancipation of mankind and the struggle for the preservation of the Earth needs a lot of new thinking, and I believe that the new thinking does not come from Washington, D.C. *We* must do the new thinking—by that I mean the masses of the world who suffer under the present decay of the capitalist system, with all its boasting. There is plenty of opportunity to do this, but new ways have to be found. It is up to you younger people to find answers! Red and green have to find ways to collaborate. Red is mostly labor and working class, and green is mostly middle class. There have been conflicts, but there has to be a way found in which they can work together. Not only must red and green work together, but also white, brown, and black.

That is the faith of a mathematician. I am not speaking as a mathematician, though, but as a common man in the sense of Sacco and Vanzetti, sharing wishes and hopes for a better society with this simple cobbler and this poor fish peddler and with you.

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## UPS AND DETROIT NEWSPAPER STRIKES

by JANE SLAUGHTER

It's already hard for union activists to remember the exhilaration of beating UPS last August. The union press was full of hope that the strike victory was, at long last, a step toward reversing the image (and reality) of labor as a loser. But the Teamsters' external victory, over a powerful corporation, was soon wiped off the front pages by revelations about internal chicanery. The news was even harder to take because it appeared that a genuine reformer, Ron Carey, had been caught in dirty dealing.

What happened inside the 1996 re-election campaign apparatus doesn't change the fact, though, that the UPS strike of 1997 was a model for the rest of the labor movement. This is even more evident when we contrast UPS with another struggle now petered into exhaustion: the Detroit newspaper strike. (The striking unions in Detroit include the Teamsters and three others.) What made the UPS strike a winner and the newspaper strike a loser?

First, the balance of forces was far more favorable to the union at UPS than in Detroit. Criticism of the blunders of the Detroit unions must be tempered by the fact that, no matter what they did, theirs would have been a tough fight to win. The struck papers, the Detroit News and Free Press, are only small pieces of two corporate empires, Gannett and Knight-

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Jane Slaughter is a labor writer in Detroit.



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Ridder, that are largely non-union. Both companies were willing to sustain big losses in Detroit while remaining profitable elsewhere. The Teamsters, on the other hand, had the advantage of one national contract that covered all 185,000 UPS workers, and their strike shut the company down completely.

Second, a key to victory at UPS was preparation. The Teamsters International waged a seven-month contract campaign both among members and, to a lesser extent, in public. It included a survey, buttons, T-shirts, "Blow the Whistle Day," petitions, and parking lot rallies. Well before that, the union had organized members against UPS's cooperative "team concept" scheme, using a video and regional workshops to get out the message that "we have a team—it's the Teamsters." This policy contrasted sharply with those of most international unions, who advocate teamwork with management 35 months out of 36, and then flounder if they try to reverse course and mobilize members against their partner/boss at contract time.

In addition, Teamsters knew what they were striking for; they had chosen a single clear issue—part-time work—that implied and required unity among UPS's two tiers of employees. It was an issue that resonated with millions of workers.

In Detroit, in contrast, there was next to no strike preparation. When leaders called members out in July 1995, confusion reigned; half the Newspaper Guild—the unions' most visible members—soon scabbed. Local leaders' stated "strategy" was to wait management out for seven months, the figure they confidently gave as the "usual" length of a newspaper strike.

Third, Ron Carey's leadership was key to winning the UPS strike. Carey hired temporary organizers from the rank and file and set in motion the preparations that unleashed a deal of bottom-up creativity in the months leading up to the strike. But Carey was less decisive in Detroit. The Teamsters saw a hot race for the international presidency in 1996, with archetypal business unionist James Hoffa Jr. challenging Carey. Detroit is Hoffa territory, and the Teamsters are far

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more decentralized than many unions. The Hoffa-ites made it clear Carey was not wanted in Detroit, even booing him at a strike rally. Although he provided much funding and sent in some talented organizers, Carey did not publicly push for a more militant direction in Detroit than local leaders were willing to pursue.

Fourth, key to winning at UPS was the 22-year-old reform caucus, Teamsters for a Democratic Union. It was TDU that put Carey in office; it was TDU's plan for a contract campaign against UPS that Carey adopted. Most important, TDU had a strong base at UPS. Over the years, shop floor leaders there had been trained in fighting the boss. In locals where local officials were lukewarm, these rank and filers were the ones who carried the ball. In the Teamsters, it was not the case that if local officials were not on the program, nothing could be done.

In Detroit, in contrast, there was little or no history of rank and file activism independent of local officials. When the strike appeared to be in trouble, an ad hoc, cross-union group of more combative members tried to promote unity and militancy, but it was too late. The majority waited, vainly, for local leaders to lead.

Fifth, UPS members were encouraged to work hard to win the strike. Drivers visited their customers, sometimes with a part-timer in tow. Activists received packets of information and flyers, such as one titled "UPS Not in the Ballpark," to be passed out at baseball games. Carey held weekly conference calls with hookups at all UPS locals.

In Detroit, it took weeks for union leaders to figure out what members should do to help win the strike. Eventually, they were encouraged to work on the circulation and advertisers' boycotts and a weekly newspaper, the *Sunday Journal.* In 29 months, officials called only three mass meetings of all strikers.

Finally, the Teamsters courted public opinion and help from other unions. AFL-CIO President John Sweeney helped round up loan pledges of $10 million. The Detroit locals also received generous donations from other unions and wide-

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spread public support in the area. Eventually, they received permission from Sweeney to call a "national" support march in Detroit—when the strike was 23 months old. But they turned down help early on, where and when it could have made a difference.

Seven weeks into the strike, on a Saturday evening, local leaders had called a rally and march to the newspapers' printing plant. Several thousand strikers and supporters showed up, then-candidate John Sweeney among them. But rather than tamely marching and going home, picketers decided to stay all night.

They massed at the gates, determined to prevent scab trucks from exiting with the lucrative Sunday edition. The mood was electric. UAW members, in particular, were out in force, ready for a fight on behalf of fellow union members they'd barely heard of before that time. It was a display of class solidarity not seen in Detroit in decades.

The trucks were blocked; management soon procured an injunction ordering everyone away from the gates. Union officials instantly reduced the picket line to a token few. All the unions' subsequent activities failed to re-create the sense of crisis, unity, and effectiveness that existed outside the plant gates on those nights in September 1995. The troops were there, but they were sent home.

One union insider recalls, "There's no doubt the energy was there, the local labor movement was prepared to provide assistance. They just never got the call."

## High Stakes

As at UPS, the stakes were high for the whole labor movement—a crushed strike in labor's hometown. The high stakes cried out for intervention from the national level. Sweeney was loaded with moral authority when he won the AFL-CIO presidency on a militant platform in October 1995. If he was serious about wanting to change labor's course, Detroit would have been the place to take a stand.

This would have meant breaking with protocol and stepping on the toes of both local union officials and the heads of

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the four international unions involved. It would have meant convincing them that, facing such deep corporate pockets, the unions' only hope was to create a political crisis in the city, one big enough that even the far-off CEOs would feel the heat. If local leaders remained committed to a conventional and losing strategy, it would have meant going around them to the rank and file.

The 1989 Pittston strike, led by now AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Rich Trumka, could have been the model. There could have been no business as usual in Detroit, with massive protests and civil disobedience, till the powers-that-be felt forced to settle. It would have meant convincing other unions to send successive waves of troops to fill the jails. It would have meant papering the cell walls with injunctions. Some strike activists proposed these tactics; they were ignored. Instead, in the first few months after his inauguration Sweeney busied himself with creating a plethora of commissions and task forces on how to revitalize the labor movement, virtually ignoring the real-life class struggle taking place, and faltering, in Detroit.

The UPS victory is one that the whole labor movement can take pride in. But those who called it a "turning point for labor" were, unfortunately, wrong. UPS could have been a turning point only if other unions were willing to apply its lessons, and other rank and file members were mobilized on their own behalf. The heads of most internationals today are far more like the stick-to-protocol-even-if-you-lose local leaders in Detroit than like the rabble-rousers of TDU. To produce more victories will take more risks, more trust in the ranks, more ferment from below than incumbent union leaders can imagine.

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## Staughton Lynd, the New Left and the Working Class

by Martin Glaberman

Staughton Lynd, *Living Inside Our Hope: A Steadfast Radical's Thoughts on Rebuilding the Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) $37.50 cloth, $14.95 paper, 281 pp. Staughton Lynd, ed., *"We Are All Leaders": The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996) $17.95 paper, 343 pp.

Though very different from one another, together Staughton Lynd's latest two books make a remarkable statement about the ideas and activities of one of the major figures of the New Left. *Living Inside Our Hope* is autobiographical in two ways. It summarizes the major events of Lynd's life and it presents the development of his ideas in disconnected chapters. He credits his parents, Robert and Helen Lynd, the authors of the two Middletown books, with significant influence on his development as a leftist. Not a little of that influence is reflected in his becoming a believing, practicing Quaker—and in his profound belief in nonviolence.

Staughton Lynd stands out as someone of the highest principles who instinctively turned to radical causes and who always put his body where his mind and mouth were. The causes he took part in embody the entire history of the New Left. He was involved at all levels of the anti-Vietnam War movement, as a conscientious objector (his wife, Alice, did draft counseling), and as a demonstrator at the Pentagon and elsewhere. His trip to Vietnam with Herbert Aptheker and Tom Hayden helped make him unemployable at major universities.

He took part in the civil rights movement in the South, teaching at the Mississippi Freedom School. He went to Nicaragua to identify with the peasants—and liberation theology seemed

Martin Glaberman is Professor Emeritus of Social Science at the College of Lifelong Learning of Wayne State University in Detroit.



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perfectly consistent with Quaker beliefs. When he could no longer teach at major colleges, Staughton and Alice became lawyers and later moved to the Youngstown, Ohio area to place themselves at the service of working people. He went to work for a labor law firm but was fired, as he put it, "for excessive sympathy with the rank and file.... [W]hen I talked to friends who had gone to work in steel mills, I was told that I would always seem to fellow workers to be exactly what I was: a product of the upper middle class with advanced degrees. 'You could be there twenty years and people would say, let's go ask the Professor,' was one comment. So we resolved to offer what we hoped would be useful skills, but not pretend to be other than what we were" (p. 54). Lynd now works as a Legal Services lawyer and is free to help workers and the poor.

What is remarkable about the Lynds and what distinguishes them from much of the New Left is their identification with the working-class and their refusal to identify with union officials and bureaucrats. Some in the New Left were never drawn to working class causes. Others gave verbal support to the working class but when the New Left was fragmented and in decline much of even that verbal support disappeared. Most of what remained tended to a kind of old left extremism embodied in rigid, authoritarian groups of a neo-Leninist or neo-Maoist complexion. A few, of course, ended up as paid flunkies of the labor bureaucracy. The Lynds never wavered in their devotion to rank-and-file struggles. Staughton remained a practicing historian, writing and editing books, most of them characterized by what is known as "history from below," oral history from rank-and-file activists and reports of the truly democratic working-class struggles that are embedded in our history.

There are two chapters in *Living Inside Our Hope* that deal with the law. One relates the attempt to use "eminent domain" to salvage the steel mills that the big corporations were abandoning. The idea was that local governments had the right to take over productive property that was being vacated and left to decay. Some legal battles were won but ultimately, trying to keep steel mills in production operated by public bodies foundered on the refusal of the federal government to supply the financing and loan guarantees that might have made it possible. But the idea did win a significant victory in keeping a major Nabisco plant from leaving Pittsburgh. It also got people thinking about the positive aspects of public ownership.

The other chapter is a theoretical discussion of communal rights. Much of this is very useful, particularly the distinction

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between individual rights and communal rights. There is, however, a tendency to blur the distinction between rights in a bourgeois society and a socialist society. The idea of communal rights makes great sense—the rights to protest and resist, need protection in any society. In a bourgeois society there are contradictions which are difficult to overcome. The rights of minorities, whether ethnic, racial, or political, are important. What, however, can a labor or socialist movement do about the rights of scabs to break a strike? I am sure it was something like this that was in the mind of a neoliberal sociologist who described the working class as authoritarian. A liberating struggle to establish the power of workers on the job is equated with the reactionary power of the employer to suppress that power. Years ago, before the age of union shops and checkoff, I was a member of what was euphemistically called an educational flying squadron. The educational function was minimal. Mainly, on monthly dues days, our function was to guard the gates to keep workers who wouldn't pay their dues from getting in. That obviously violated the minority rights of workers who opposed the union. That might not be important in the case of dues collection. But what about strikes? One of the weaknesses of the Detroit newspaper strike was the refusal of the local (and national) leaders to break or stretch the law to keep the newspaper plants from working.

Underlying the problem is how one views the difference between socialist and capitalist society. I would think the protection of minority or majority communal rights would be essential in a socialist society, or its socialist character would be in doubt. The role of law in a capitalist society is to protect capitalism. That does not mean, in a large and complex society, that there aren't all kinds of cases in which the law can be used against capital. I am for anything that works. But it is important to remember that we have a government of people, not laws. The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution was designed to protect freed slaves. The Supreme Court simply decided to define corporations as "persons" and so the Fourteenth Amendment became a barrier to restrictions on and regulation of big business. The same court, of course, did not find any problem in viewing Jim Crow as separate but equal and therefore legal.

*Living Inside Our Hope* ends with an interesting essay on "The Webbs, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg." There is not the space to go into an extended discussion of Lynd's rejection of Lenin in favor of Luxemburg. The aim of the essay—to defend democracy in a

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revolution, democracy from below, is absolutely valid. Unfortunately, it is based on misconceptions of Lenin which are widespread on the left. Ultimately, I believe the issue of a socialism which is both democratic and revolutionary will be decided, not by debate or theory, but by practice. The post-Second World War working class in the industrial countries is far in advance of the Russian proletariat of 1917—in education, in literacy, in technological knowledge, in weight in society, in the ability and means to communicate, in the ability to organize itself. The debates of 1917 are only partly relevant.

There is another important chapter on "The Possibilities of Radicalism in the Early 1930s: The Case of Steel." The chapter describes how important attempts of rank-and-file steel workers to organize themselves in the 1930s were crushed by union bureaucrats. He quotes Harvey O'Connor: "The grand tactical plan for the united front of steel's mine and mill workers, conceived on the spur of the moment by local rank-and-file leaders in both industries, had been scuttled by a stronger united front, that of Washington, the union leaders, and the steel companies." (p. 145) John L. Lewis and then Philip Murray as head of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) signed contracts with the coal companies and later with U.S. Steel without consulting the union membership and, often enough, violating the wishes of the rank and file. The theme of this essay, which appeared in *Radical America* in 1972, is the theme of *We Are All Leaders.*

Lynd writes in *We Are All Leaders* that:

> There appear to be three basic ways of looking at the CIO in relation to the alternative unionism of the 1930s. The first view is that at the outset of large social movements there is often a period of mass enthusiasm, egalitarianism, and 'primitive democracy,' ... but as the movement grows and settles down to its serious tasks, an efficient centralized bureaucracy inevitably takes over. In this view the bureaucratized business union movement that the CIO had become by 1950 was natural and inevitable.
>
> A second interpretation of the CIO in its relation to alternative unionism is that everything depends on the ideology of the leadership.... This way of looking at things tends to lead to campaigns to replace the top personnel of existing AFL-CIO national unions.
>
> While the authors of these essays naturally differ somewhat among themselves, they lean toward a third way of viewing the 1930s. We propose that the CIO *from the beginning* intended a top-down, so-called responsible unionism that would prevent strikes and control the rank and file." (pp. 7-8, emphasis in original)

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The contributors cover a range of events: Rosemary Feurer's description of the organization of a nutpickers' union by black and white women in St. Louis in 1933-34; Peter Rachleff's report on the Independent Union of All Workers in Minnesota in 1933-37; Janet Irons on the general textile strike of 1934; Mark Naison on the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union: Elizabeth Faue on Minneapolis in the 1930s; and John Borsos on solidarity unionism in Barberton, OH 1933-41.

These essays illustrate something an old friend, the late George Rawick, noted years ago: unions don't organize workers, workers organize unions. In the upsurge of the 1930s, most of the organizing was done by local working men and women. But when the unions were organized, control—including organizing—was placed in the hands of union officials. Militancy was squelched, democracy was severely restricted. The men who led the CIO were dyed-in-the-wool bureaucrats such as John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman, Philip Murray and their ilk. Their basic concerns were order, labor peace, and a cozy relationship with the government and the Democratic Party. The importance of these essays to understanding the contemporary labor movement cannot be overstated. The current leaders of the labor movement (presumably in the process of revival) are the descendants of the bureaucrats of the 1930s. They may recruit more members but they will not permit any significant diminution of their power in their organizations.

There are some problems, however, in the conceptual framework of these authors. One problem is the concept of "community unionism." Elizabeth Faue counterposes community-based unions to workplace-based unions. It is never made clear what the meaning of community-based unions was. All unions are work based. Communities became involved in periods of struggle in the 1930s (in some cases supported by organizations of the unemployed). Power or control of unions, however, was always centered at the workplace. The tendency to move away from a community base (which, as Faue points out, removed women from positions of influence) was also accompanied by movement away from a workplace base. The bureaucratic national unions which gained control also took control away from the shop or office floor. If women were excluded from influence, so were most men—although, of course, top union leaderships remained dominated by white males.

An example of what is involved can be seen in the 1997 UPS strike. The issues that the leadership put forward revolved around

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reducing the number of part-time workers. A UPS executive let slip that a reason the company wants part-timers is because one worker, working eight hours, can't keep up with the speedup pace. So they prefer two part-time workers, each working three or four hours. That there is a horrendous speedup at UPS is known, a speedup allowed to develop by the Teamsters Union. But the Teamsters are no better than any other union in insisting on workers control of working conditions. That is, national unions, from the 1930s on, fought for demands that were outside the workplace and allowed, and still allow, company control of the job.

Another problem is what the revealed history of the 1930s tells us about possibilities now and in the future. The tendency in this book is to present the working-class self-activity of the 1930s as a model. That can be problematic. The farmers who created the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union are long gone. So are most of the working-class communities that are described in this book. What was possible in the depths of the depression with organizations of the unemployed and other community and ethnic organizations cannot be simply duplicated. What is most important about these experiences of the 1930s is not their specific details but the important underlying reality—that new forms of organization are created by workers in the course of a massive social upsurge. These are not likely to duplicate the forms of the 1930s but it is necessary to be aware of the sources of working-class self-activity and the creativity that workers bring to their struggles.

In the post-Second World War world workers have shown the possibility of new levels of mass struggle. In 1956 in Hungary workers in forty-eight hours created workers councils and took de facto control of the society. In 1968 French workers, in opposition to all their organizations and leaders, occupied all the factories of France. In the event of another upsurge resulting from the current crisis in capitalist society, there is little point in assuming a replay of the 1930s.

The old left was unable to confront the issues of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. As a result, new forms of struggle were created in the fight against the Vietnam War, for civil rights, for student rights, and so on. What survives of those struggles? In an important sense, these books by Staughton Lynd represent the best of what is left and demonstrate the continuing relevance of those struggles.

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*(Continued from inside front cover)*

own research. But the magazine has one basic rule of thumb: to produce things that people can read on the way to work, or during a lunch break, or in the other rare and precious hours snatched from many other activities and responsibilities. We aim for articles written for intelligent non-specialists, articles that are longer and more substantial than what our readers can get from newspaper op-ed pages, or even from news magazines, but shorter and less burdened with jargon or professional code-language than the typical piece in an academic journal. At the same time, our aim is not simply to summarize or digest ideas already well covered elsewhere but to add something original to a socialist understanding of the world.

This very specific mission has never been an easy one. Any writer knows how much harder it is to say something clearly and concisely than it is to ramble on endlessly. Saying something important in short sentences and accessible language is far more difficult than creating the *appearance* of profundity by means of pretentious and unintelligible prose. Clear concise prose also has what some writers may think is another disadvantage: it exposes the author to critical scrutiny. Writers whom no one really understands can hide behind their obscurity to shield themselves from criticism. While today's most fashionable intellectual trends have increasingly taken that easy way out, *MR* authors have resisted the temptation and have managed to say important things without disguise and deceptive window-dressing.

Of course we've always been conscious that there are things—important things—we simply can't do. Brevity is often a virtue, but some things just can't be said briefly. There are many contentious issues that need careful dissection and extended debate. But if *MR*'s style has meant that there have been some important tasks we couldn't perform, it has until recently been easy to accept what might be called the vices of our virtues. *MR* has had its own job to do, which no one else has done in the same way, and we've been able to count on others to do the things we can't.

Things are different now. There used to be a wide range of left periodicals, whose politics had certain basic principles in common with ours but who approached them from a different angle. Some, for instance, saw their main task as educating the educators, talking, at great length, to academics in their own specialized languages and taking for granted their specialized knowledge.

But now the socialist culture isn't as rich as it once was, and there are very few outlets for socialist opinion, ideas, and analysis. Many journals of the left have abandoned socialist discussion and debate for other more fashionable "discourses." So there are now many more gaps to be filled. For instance, many long-time and loyal readers of *MR* who teach in universities have lost the other resources they used to rely on for a different kind of extended in-depth debate.

*(Continued on page 23)*

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